

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
STATE OF MONTANA

STEVE BULLOCK  
GOVERNOR



Angela McLean  
LT. GOVERNOR

August 18, 2015

Senator Jon Tester  
311 Hart Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Steve Daines  
320 Hart Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Congressman Ryan Zinke  
113 Cannon House Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Tester, Senator Daines, and Congressman Zinke:

It has come to our attention that in their current form, both House and Senate budget bills eliminate funding for the Preschool Development Grants. Montana is one of just 18 recipients of this competitive grant, and we urge you to consider the incredible impact this funding has on our state and work to restore the funds.

If restored, the funds Montana receives over the four years of the Preschool Development Grant will provide access to high-quality preschool for more than 6,000 at-risk children in some of our highest need areas of the state, including communities on all seven Indian Reservations. These children and their families will have access to the kinds of high-quality early childhood education that can make a real difference for their future. Funds are also directly supporting professional development and scholarships for preschool teachers – building the capacity of Montana's early childhood workforce to ensure that more children have the benefit of great preschool teachers, no matter where they live.

Children who take part in high-quality early childhood education programs are more likely to read at grade level, less likely to repeat a grade or require special education, more likely to earn a high school diploma, and less likely to become teenage parents, require public assistance, abuse drugs, or end up in jail. When all children arrive at kindergarten ready to learn, it allows them to hit the ground running in their educational career, and it also helps to reduce disciplinary challenges, so teachers can focus on teaching, instead of dealing with behavioral issues. This means that when their peers arrive to kindergarten school-ready, *all* children will benefit and get the attention and focus that they deserve in the classroom.

Investing in high-quality early childhood programs like preschool is not only the right thing to do for our kids, it is one of the best economic development investments we can make. Studies show that \$1 invested in early childhood programs returns at least \$7 to our economy through money saved in remedial and special education costs, reduced need for social services, health care costs and reduced rate of incarceration and higher rates of employment and earnings for those who participate.

As Governor and Superintendent, we work every day to make sure our Montana students receive the best education and the best opportunity for success. Yet because the state of Montana is in the dwindling minority of states that have never invested state dollars in our earliest learners, we are in danger of falling behind. The Preschool Development Grant is critical for our state to build, develop, and expand high-quality preschool programs so children from low-and moderate-income families have the opportunity enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school and in life. We urge you to stand with Montana's earliest learners, their families and their teachers, and work to fully fund the Preschool Development Grants.

Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Steve Bullock, consisting of stylized initials and a surname.

STEVE BULLOCK  
Governor

A blue ink signature of Denise Juneau, featuring a large initial 'D' and a surname.

DENISE JUNEAU  
Superintendent of Public Instruction